

**THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN
STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING**

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THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY
IN STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING

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INTRODUCTION

The role of the military in the area of strategic advice and decision-making -- particularly the role played by the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- is an issue which has caused considerable debate since the creation of the JCS as a formal body. Presidents, scholars, politicians and laymen have disagreed sharply over exactly what the role should be, and how influential the military has been in that role.

Many scholars, journalists, and research foundations, for example, believe that the military has become increasingly influential and that this excessive influence constitutes a serious threat to our democratic processes. Lasswell, in discussing the threat in what he calls the "garrison state", warns:

that even if we avoid another war, a more insidious menace is that the conditions of continuing crisis may undermine and eventually destroy free institutions.¹

Senator George McGovern expressed the opinion that this threat has already become a reality, commenting in 1969:

Now that the American destiny is safely in the hands of the military-industrial complex, we wake to a new decade.²

Many prominent writers on military affairs are also worried about the balance of civilian-military relations. Their worry, however, is that the civilians have taken over the military. The following statements are illustrative of this feeling:

¹Robert Lasswell, National Security and Individual Freedom (New York, 1950), p. 23.

²George McGovern, Interview in Esquire (Vol. 73 , December, 1969), p. 189.

The Secretary (Secretary McNamara) has penetrated deep into fields once reserved for the military. He has barked shins throughout the country's polity and economy...The professional military leadership of the nation is being short-circuited in the current decision-making process at the Pentagon.³

In common with many other military men, active and retired, I am profoundly apprehensive of the pipe-smoking, tree-full-of-owls type of so-called professional defense intellectuals who have been brought into this nation's Capitol...It seems to me that the old strengths apply. In my opinion, the two that count for most in the nuclear space age, regardless of academic cerebrations, are national determination and military forces designed to achieve military victory, not tailored to obtain compromise.⁴

A noted historian has observed:

Again and again, military men have seen themselves hurled into war by the ambitions, passions and blindness of civilian governments, almost wholly uninformed as to the limits of their military potential and almost recklessly indifferent to the requirements of the war they let loose.⁵

Obviously, from this sampling of statements, one can conclude that there is no lack of support for either of two diametrically opposed opinions. On the one hand is the belief that the influence in policy-making is overwhelmingly civilian; on the other is the belief that it is overwhelmingly military.

Similarly, there have been widely differing opinions concerning what the proper relationship between civilian and military should be in the decision-making process. Each President, as Commander-in-Chief, has seen his military leaders in a slightly different role and has used them accordingly. President Truman, for example, in addition to using his military

³Jack Kraft, "McNamara and His Enemies", Harper's Magazine (August, 1961), p. 41.

⁴Thomas White, "Strategy and Defense Intellectuality", Saturday Evening Post (May 4, 1963), pp. 10-12.

⁵Alfred Vagts, The History of Militarism (London, 1938), p. 33.

leaders as advisers, capitalized on their prestige and public popularity which carried over from WWII and used his chiefs to a large degree in an advocacy role, "merchandising" foreign policy such as the Truman Doctrine, and containment. General Omar Bradley, Truman's Chairman of the JCS, made fifty-seven public appearances before Congress, civilian groups and over radio and television in which he discussed the important issues of military policy. Moreover, he delivered the classic exposition of the Truman military policy in his "Gibraltar" speech and frequently made broad statements on foreign policy.⁶

President Eisenhower, by comparison, was considerably more restrictive in his view of the role of the JCS. Because of his five star rank and his personal popularity, Eisenhower had less need than Truman for support from the military either in the merchandising of policy or as military advisers in the strategic decision-making process. President Eisenhower viewed his Chiefs as members of a team which, to a large degree, should act as a rubber stamp, endorsing strategic decisions handed down by the President.

During the Indo-China crisis in 1954, the crises over the Chinese offshore islands, Suez, Hungary, and renewed Soviet threats in Berlin, he showed a large degree of independence in the adoption of courses of action. The Eisenhower administration wanted agreement; not advocacy, from the JCS.⁷

⁶Samuel Huntington, The Soldier and the State, (Cambridge, 1959), p. 398.

⁷Dwight Eisenhower, The White House Years: Mandate for Change (New York, 1963), pp. 88-89.

While the role of the JCS varied somewhat during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, the conflict and uncertainty surrounding the role of the JCS seemed to reach a peak in the 1960's. During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations the influence and prestige of the JCS reached its lowest point since becoming an institutionalized body. The Nixon administration, by contrast, has reversed the deteriorating Presidential-JCS relationship.

It will be the aim of this paper, therefore, to examine the relationship between the office of the President and the JCS in an effort to determine what role the military should play, and what role they have played in the decision-making process; and because of its sharp contrasts, the period selected for examination will be the Kennedy-Johnson-Nixon administrations. Prior to this task, however, it will be necessary to examine the military's own view of its proper function and then compare this definition with actual practices. Although there is no precise definition of the JCS role, it is nevertheless axiomatic that effective strategic planning and coordination cannot be achieved without some agreement between the President and his uniformed military advisers over the proper role of the professional military in the strategic decision-making process.

MODEL RELATIONSHIP

Today in Vietnam the U.S. finds itself in a unique position; it is withdrawing from a conflict whose outcome is still very much in doubt. This has never happened before in American history. It may be a long time before historians will be able to judge the correctness of the policies pursued by the United States in Southeast Asia, but already

many aspects of the war have been widely debated and, inevitably, some of the questions relate to the conduct of the war as a possible explanation for its excessive cost and duration. Was military force inappropriate to attain the national goals in this instance? Was force improperly used? Was our strategy correct? Were our tactics sound?

By law, "...the Joint Chiefs of Staff are the principal military advisers to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense."⁸ Did the JCS provide sound or unsound advice? Did the President listen to their advice?

The answers to the last two questions will be a long time coming. More Presidential papers will have to be made available, volumes of documents will have to be declassified, and books and memoirs will have to be written before the answers can be found. However, it is possible to examine the environment in which the JCS operated during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in order to assess their collective influence upon the formulation of policy involving the use of the Armed Forces and to examine the change of environment created by the Nixon administration.

Before beginning an inquiry of this sort, a norm or reference for comparison must be established which describes the relationship between the President and the leaders of the military services. Then the interactions of past Presidents and their Chiefs can be rated. Certain aspects of this model relationship are widely supported, such as civilian control over the military, and the military's advisory function. However, this

⁸ National Security Act of 1947 (as amended), in Keith Clark and Laurence Legere (eds), The President and the Management of National Security (New York, 1969), p. 263.

support of civilian control has not been held to mean that the military forfeit its advisory role in the policy-making process.

The model relationship chosen comes from a book first published by the U.S. Naval War College in 1936 called "Sound Military Decisions". This book was used for years to enlarge the viewpoint and broaden the basis of the professional judgment of officers. Based on an enormous body of literature which included all available and pertinent military writings, "Sound Military Decisions" became a "bible" to students at the Naval War College prior to Pearl Harbor and throughout World War II. Although it has never been incorporated into any official directives, it is considered to be an accurate reflection of the military's philosophy concerning military input to strategic decision-making.

What influence the following passage from "Sound Military Decisions" had upon the drafters of the Act of Congress which made the Joint Chiefs of Staff "the principal military advisers to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense"⁹ is unknown, but given its general acceptance among the military services, as well as the fact that it predates the National Security Act of 1947, it is used in this paper as the basis for the model relationship.

Understanding between the Civil representatives of the State and the leaders of the Armed Forces is manifestly essential to the coordination of national policy with the power to enforce it. Therefore, if serious omissions and the adoption of ill-advised measures are to be avoided, it is necessary that wise professional counsel be available to the State. While military strategy may determine whether the aims of policy are possible of attainment, policy may, beforehand, determine largely the success or failure of military strategy. It behooves policy to ensure not only that

⁹ Ibid.

military strategy pursue appropriate aims, but that the work of strategy be allotted adequate means and be undertaken under the most favorable conditions.¹⁰

Looking at the last twelve years, there are all sorts of questions which can be asked in the light of the model relationship described above. One can question the amount of understanding which existed between the civilian and military sectors; the wisdom of the advice offered, the means allotted to support that strategy, and the conditions in which the strategy was undertaken. While the attempt to answer any of these questions would be equally interesting and worthwhile, it will be the aim of this paper to examine the degree of understanding which existed between the office of the President and the JCS in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and to comment on the changing relationship evident in the Nixon administration.

JFK and the JCS

When John F. Kennedy became President of the United States, two factors were to have a substantial impact on the professional military establishment: his preconceptions about the military, and his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. Before the first 100 days in office, the President came to depend on Mr. McNamara for military advice and significantly changed the relationship between the office of the President and the JCS. His own experiences as a naval officer left him unawed by the generals and admirals who were to work for him. In 1944, while recovering from wounds he had received when he was the Commander of PT 109, he wrote to a friend concerning the

¹⁰U.S. Naval War College, Sound Military Decisions (Newport, R.I., 1942), p. 9.

superhuman ability of the Navy to screw up everything they touch... Even the simple delivery of a letter frequently overburdens this heaving, puffing war machine of ours. God save this country of ours from those patriots whose war cry is 'What this country needs is to be run with military efficiency'.¹¹

How much this attitude remained with him until 1960 is unknown, but regardless of what his personal views of the military may have been, he always took a keen interest in military affairs. He once commented that there were only two posts in the Cabinet which he would consider -- Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense.¹² Later, as President, he took great interest in his role as Commander-in-Chief, frequently inspecting military bases and leading investigations into such fields as counter-insurgency, and flexible response. Moreover, it appears that he came into office well disposed to the military, specifically the JCS. He had become convinced that the Eisenhower administration had undercut the military posture in favor of balancing the budget, and had expressed a desire to provide the military leaders with greater access to the President.¹³

One of the major planks in Kennedy's Presidential campaign platform was the concern that the U.S. was falling behind the U.S.S.R. in usable military power and that the strategy of massive retaliation was unrealistic, leaving the U.S., in effect, two courses of action -- worldwide devastation or submission.¹⁴ Prompted by his concern for the state of the

¹¹Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York, 1965), p. 18.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Adam Yarmolinsky, The Military Establishment (New York, 1971), p. 123.

¹⁴Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (Boston, Mass., 1965), p. 311.

national defense, he conducted a fairly extensive talent hunt to find a man who would make a strong Secretary of Defense, someone who could unify the efforts of the Department of Defense and especially the armed services. This search ended at Ford Motor Company and Robert S. McNamara. Characterized by the military as the "civilian on horseback", Mr. McNamara accepted the post offered by President-elect Kennedy with very specific ideas concerning how he would go about getting control of the Department of Defense.

When I became Secretary of Defense in 1961, I felt that either of two broad philosophies of management could be followed by the man at the head of this great establishment. He could play an essentially passive role -- a judicial role. In this role the Secretary would make the decisions required of him by law by approving recommendations made to him. On the other hand, the Secretary of Defense could play an active role providing aggressive leadership -- questioning, suggesting alternatives, proposing objectives and stimulating progress. This active role represents my own philosophy of management. I became convinced that there was room for and need of this kind of management philosophy in the Department of Defense.¹⁵

Immediately after McNamara's acceptance of the post of Secretary of Defense, President-elect Kennedy requested him to conduct a comprehensive survey of the Department of Defense. Shortly after the inauguration, McNamara submitted the results of his survey. That part of the report which dealt with the effectiveness of the armed services stressed the vulnerability of the strategic nuclear forces to surprise missile attack, a non-nuclear force weak in combat-ready divisions, in airlift capacity and in tactical air support, a counterinsurgency force which, for all practical purposes, was non-existent, and a weapons inventory which was dangerously understocked in some elements, and greatly overstocked in others.

¹⁵Robert McNamara, "McNamara Defines His Job", New York Times Magazine (April, 1964), p. 108.

There were many "canned" or contingency decisions which were prepared in advance with little capability or thought of up-dating them to meet an actual emergency. The mobility of the Army depended on the rapid air-lift capability of the Air Force, which the Air Force did not have. The Air Force supply lists were based on the premise that any subsequent war would last a few days, while the Army was stockpiling for two years.¹⁶

President Kennedy's suspicion had been reinforced. Although he had come into the office of the President with the impression that the JCS had merely been carrying out the Eisenhower-Dulles strategy -- making do with a budget ceiling imposed by President Eisenhower, it is doubtful that he was favorably impressed with the evidence of lack of coordination and understanding between the various services.

Concerning the JCS members, the President regarded them as vestiges of the Eisenhower administration, despite the fact that the Chiefs had an apolitical institutional history and had been equally loyal to Democrats and Republicans alike. Kennedy obviously wanted to appoint his own JCS, remarking that "Any President should have the right to choose carefully his own military advisers".¹⁷

However, despite the adverse report submitted by McNamara, and his own personal feelings, he appeared to be willing to let normal attrition change the membership of the JCS. He had already brought General Maxwell Taylor out of retirement to act as his personal military adviser until the time came when General Taylor could be appointed as Chairman of the JCS.

¹⁶Sorensen, p. 603-604.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 608.

The crisis precipitated by the Bay of Pigs, however, caused Kennedy to mistrust the competence and judgment of the Chiefs.¹⁸

It is not the purpose of this paper to consider all the aspects of the events surrounding the Bay of Pigs episode, however, this unfortunate event could be viewed as a turning point in Presidential-JCS relations and for that reason certain aspects of the Bay of Pigs merit examination. Although Kennedy's appraisal of the JCS had not been the highest before the Bay of Pigs, he had used them in their traditional or model role as military advisers. Having lost a great deal of confidence in his Chiefs as a consequence of the Cuban disaster, President Kennedy chose to use Secretary McNamara and a number of "ad hoc" advisers for his military advice and practically ignored the JCS. This pattern of poor communications was evident before the Bay of Pigs and intensified during and after its occurrence and was a major factor in the deterioration of civil-military relations at the highest levels.

From the outset, the Chiefs were not happy about the CIA conducting large-scale military operations, and, in my opinion, understandably so. The Chiefs held the project at arm's length and only commented on the feasibility, or availability of necessary men and materials, when required to do so.

In this regard, the Chiefs had commented in January, 1961, that success of the CIA plan to land at Trinidad had a chance of initial military success and that the ultimate success would depend either on a major

¹⁸Schlesinger, p. 291.

uprising within the island or substantial outside support.¹⁹ The Chiefs were subsequently criticized by Kennedy advisers for the ambiguous stance they took in the pre-invasion planning. Arthur Schlesinger, for example, commented that the JCS position paper, without restating the underlying assumptions for victory, merely concluded that the plan as proposed had a fair chance for success if it could be executed in time.²⁰ The JCS clarified their position in March of 1961, however, repeating their previous statement that native Cuban resistance was indispensable for a successful invasion. They could see no way short of direct American intervention in which the Brigade, finally numbering about 2500 men, could possibly overcome the 200,000 army and militia of Cuba, no matter how well motivated, trained and equipped they might be.²¹

As the planning continued, Kennedy instructed his advisers to assume a decreased American involvement in the operation. Consequently, new courses of action were sought. The JCS were asked to comment on the suitability of various landing sites, including the Bay of Pigs and Zapata. On March 14, the Chiefs agreed that Zapata would be the better landing site, but they still preferred the original plan calling for a landing at Trinidad.*²²

*There is some disagreement concerning whether the Chiefs did in fact reassert their claim that they preferred the original landing site. Ted Sorensen claims that they did not. However, the Bay of Pigs, which was the JCS' third choice was ultimately selected.²³

¹⁹Mario Lazo, Dagger in the Heart (New York, 1968), p. 238.

²⁰Ibid., p. 238-239.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 243.

²³Sorensen, p. 305.

Although the JCS had made it quite clear that an internal uprising was essential for the success of the plan, the CIA personnel who were in charge of the operation made their preparations without counting on an uprising and had never collected any intelligence estimates concerning the possibility of such an uprising. The invasion plan, as understood by both the President and the JCS, assumed that, immediately after the establishment of an enlarged beachhead, armed members of the Cuban resistance would organize and spearhead the internal uprising. The CIA apparently had a different viewpoint. Allen Dulles, former Director of the CIA, states in his book, "The Craft of Intelligence",

I know of no estimate that a spontaneous uprising of the unarmed population of Cuba would be touched off by the landing.²⁴

The planning continued without these gaps in communications even being resolved, and, if anything, they became more numerous. The CIA representatives dominated the planning meetings and the Joint Chiefs assumed a position of institutional correctness which, in the extreme, can amount to insubordination or even sabotage. The planning body met as a group four times after March 15th to update and review plans. The preference of the Chiefs for the landing at Trinidad was on record, and they, at no time, formally approved the new plan. Technically they had performed their roles as military advisers. They did not, however, at any of these four meetings oppose the new plan. This lack of opposition gave the White House an impression of collaboration between the CIA and the JCS, and it was assumed that the final scheme had the whole-hearted support

²⁴Schlesinger, p. 247.

of the JCS.²⁵

But what about the mutual trust and understanding between the Commander-in-Chief and his military leaders, as described in the model relationship? It is rather unsettling to think that a government could proceed on such a hazardous and crucial course of action assuming the consensus of the planning staff. Or that the President could even assume this consensus when the JCS had repeatedly stated their preconditions for success. The point here is not to try to fix the blame for the failure of the Bay of Pigs operation on one office or another, but to ask how such misunderstanding could have occurred. One is tempted to speculate whether this same situation could have occurred if the National Security Council machinery had been used as it had been in the Eisenhower administration.

Concerning the JCS participation in the operation, there is very little other than speculation which can be said. Numerous leading military officers who were directly involved in the Bay of Pigs operations studiously avoid any comment concerning JCS participation, other than the "correct" utterances concerning loyalty to the President and their oaths of office.*

How could there be such a lack of understanding between the Commander-in-Chief and his dedicated and experienced military leaders? The President was confident that the JCS would not let him undertake a course of

*Several generals and admirals, speaking to Armed Forces Staff College student body from January 1971 to June 1971 were asked various questions concerning JCS participation in the Bay of Pigs and invariably the answers added up to "no comment".

²⁵Ibid., p. 250.

of action which would lead to disaster, and yet he seemed to either misunderstand or ignore the various preconditions for success and the advice that the plan would have to be executed boldly and forcefully.²⁶ It is possible that the JCS believed the President to be personally pushing for the covert CIA invasion since the plan would not die a bureaucratic death even after all the preconditions and reservations raised by the JCS. Perhaps the JCS wanted to show the President that they could in fact get along with the CIA, and that they were not just parochial nitpickers.

The hard intelligence relative to the invasion was difficult for the Chiefs to acquire since the CIA was so secretive about the details. Rather than briefings on formal operations plans, the Chiefs were given presentations concerning the operations. This approach did not permit the Chiefs to thoroughly scrutinize the plan nor to append formal recommended changes. As an example, the changes urged by Kennedy's advisers which cancelled 40 of the 48 planned air strokes were unknown to the JCS until the last minute.²⁷ Dr. Mario Lazo, former leader of the anti-Castro underground inside Cuba stated that the final plan which the JCS had not opposed was changed at the insistence of the President's advisers without the knowledge of the JCS and that these changes doomed the invasion before it ever got started.

Lyman Kirkpatrick, former Deputy Director of the CIA and at the time of the Bay of Pigs, Inspector General of the CIA, found no fault with the JCS as he reflected on the episode:

²⁶Ibid., p. 290.

²⁷Lazo, p. 285.

Throughout the rest of Washington, after the Bay of Pigs, there was a general effort to try and move out of the hot seat and put somebody else in it. There were those that tried unjustly to blame the Defense Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose participation had been limited.²⁸

When it was over, regardless of who was to blame, the President and the country had been embarrassed, and obviously many mistakes had been made and many people shared in the blame. Publicly, President Kennedy assumed all the blame, but in the company of his personal confidants, he expressed a great disappointment in the performance of his advisers. He then proceeded to replace those individuals who he felt had failed him. He could not conduct an immediate purge, mostly for political reasons, but eventually all those who he suspected had failed him were either removed or their functions replaced by organizations of his own making.

President Kennedy's public acceptance of the blame for the failure did not stop the attack on the JCS, however. Senator Gore called for the dismissal of the entire JCS.²⁹ Senator Long called for the removal of General Lemnitzer.³⁰ Secretary McNamara did nothing to clarify the JCS role in the ill-fated invasion. President Kennedy did pick this time, however, to pose with the JCS in the Rose Garden at the White House for an official picture which was accompanied with unusually heavy publicity.³¹ Finally, in June, 1961, former President Eisenhower came to their defense,

²⁸ Lyman Kirkpatrick, Jr., The Real CIA (New York, 1968), p. 201.

²⁹ "Gore Would Oust the Joint Chiefs", The New York Times, May 20, 1961, p. 1:5.

³⁰ "Would Oust Lemnitzer", The New York Times, June 5, 1961, p. 3:4.

³¹ "President Poses With Joint Chiefs", The New York Times, May 28, 1961, p. 39:5.

which for all practical purposes, ended the attack on the JCS from outside the administration.³²

Throughout these attacks, the President made no public denouncement of his Chiefs, although in private he is quoted as having been extremely derogatory toward them. These comments reflect an attitude which carried through his administration, and whether or not he actually said them, the impression that he had said them affected the attitude of his civilian advisers and other members of his administration. Schlesinger, for example, reports:

The President reserved his innermost thoughts and, in the end, blamed only himself. But he was a human being and not totally free of resentment. He would say at times, 'My God, the bunch of advisers we inherited...can you imagine being President and leaving behind someone like all those people here?' My impression is that, among these advisers, the Joint Chiefs had disappointed him most for their cursory review of the military plans.³³

The President felt that he knew where the weak spots were in his administration and that he would never again trust the professional military advice of the holdover Chiefs of Staff. A full year and a half later, Sorensen reports the President as saying that the advice of every member of his executive staff regarding the Cuban episode was unanimous and the advice was all wrong. Sorensen reflects, however, that the advice was not nearly so well considered nor unanimous as the President might have imagined. The Chiefs of Staff, whose only inputs, meager as they were, were primarily concerned only with the feasibility of the plan, addressed the suitability and acceptability little or not at all. More-

³² Dwight Eisenhower, "I Pay My Personal Tribute to the JCS", The New York Times, June 2, p. 14:5.

³³ Schlesinger, p. 295.

over, there had been no comprehensive study of the plan by the Chiefs as a body and individually they differed concerning some of the plan's features. Since the plan belonged to the CIA, it appears that the Chiefs were not as critical of its features as they might normally have been.³⁴

If the President and the White House staff felt that they had learned some hard lessons, the lesson was obviously not lost on the JCS, and they reacted in their own way to the Cuban fiasco. It began to appear to the White House that the Chiefs were earnestly building a record which would permit them to say that whatever the President did was in opposition to their advice.³⁵ Thus, returning to the model relationship, if mutual understanding, trust, and respect are essential to achieving the proper relationship between a President and his military advisers, the JCS as an institution was now defunct for all intents and purposes. Under such circumstances, the Chiefs could hardly perform their proper advisory role in strategic decision-making.

Obviously, the President of the United States cannot carry out his duties as Commander-in-Chief without professional military advice, and President Kennedy recognized this. Having lost confidence in the JCS, the President felt it was necessary to look for military counsel elsewhere. The President had long been an admirer of General Maxwell Taylor. General Taylor's credentials were impressive. He had compiled an outstanding combat record. Personally he was urbane and sophisticated and was considered by many to be an intellectual.

Earlier, under the Eisenhower administration, General Taylor had

³⁴Sorensen, p. 305.

³⁵Schlesinger, p. 338.

become dissatisfied with the decreased role of the Army in the massive retaliation strategy, and had retired from his position of Chief of Staff of the Army. In his book, "The Uncertain Trumpet", which was written in his interim retirement, General Taylor attacked the doctrine of massive retaliation and called for a posture of flexible response. Kennedy had read Taylor's book and had been impressed with Taylor's thinking, and even before the Bay of Pigs, had brought him to the White House as his personal adviser.³⁶

On 30 September, 1962, General Lemnitzer turned over the Chairmanship of the JCS to General Taylor and departed for Europe and NATO. With General Decker's retirement from the Army on the same day, all the Eisenhower Chiefs had been replaced with the exception of General Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps, who, of all the Eisenhower Chiefs, had been Kennedy's favorite.³⁷ General Curtis LeMay had become USAF Chief of Staff in June, 1961, and Admiral George Anderson assumed the role of Chief of Naval Operations in August, 1961. Now that President Kennedy had his own team of military advisers, the relationship between the Commander-in-Chief and his military leaders would hopefully return more closely to the model relationship set forth earlier. Unfortunately, the events of the Cuban missile crisis specifically, and the interposition of the Secretary of Defense generally, did little to improve the stature of the JCS.

Early in his administration, Kennedy had instructed his Chiefs to "...base their advice not on narrow military considerations alone, but on

³⁶ Sorensen, p. 644.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 607.

broad gagued political and economic factors as well."³⁸ The model relationship, while considering the relation between policy aims and strategy, does not permit the military to attempt to determine national policy. Accordingly, if the President were to ask the JCS about the propriety of the U.S. using force to accomplish its foreign policy aims, it would be improper for the military to answer in an official capacity.

Considering the model, the only questions to which the military Chiefs could legitimately address themselves in the Cuban missile crisis would be those concerning the military means available to counter the missile threat, the courses of action available, the most promising course of action, and the cost of the course of action in terms of men and materials. However, the desire of the President to have the military broaden their horizons was clearly evident in some of the high-level deliberations which took place in conjunction with the Cuban missile crisis. Robert Kennedy recalls that the President was disappointed in the military, General Taylor excepted, in that they seemed to give very little consideration to the overall implications of their recommendations. He was irritated because they could not look beyond the military field. President Kennedy assumed that the military had been trained to do nothing more than wage war and that they had little appreciation for anything else. Consequently, for these reasons and others, he considered Secretary McNamara as the most valuable member of his administration.³⁹

Arthur Schlesinger quotes the President as saying, "...an invasion

³⁸Ibid., p. 605.

³⁹Robert Kennedy, Thirteen Days (New York, 1969), p. 119-120.

(of Cuba) would have been a mistake -- a wrong use of our power. But the military are mad. They wanted to do this. It's lucky for us that we have McNamara over there."⁴⁰ Sorensen recalls another occasion in October, 1962, in which the President expressed disgust with the JCS for favoring an air strike or an invasion in Cuba.⁴¹ It may be noted parenthetically that the better course of action will probably never be determined. There has never been an on-site inspection to insure that all the missiles were actually removed, and one can point to the possible existence of a Soviet missile submarine base at Cienfuegos in 1970 as an argument against the President's decision in 1962. Would more aggressive action such as an invasion precipitated a nuclear exchange? Doubtful, but it will probably never be known.

None of those who have written about the high-level conferences relating to the Cuban missile crisis expressed any disappointment with the performance of General Taylor who had just assumed the Chairmanship of the JCS. Neither Robert Kennedy, Schlesinger, nor Sorensen reveal what General Taylor had to say, but it must have satisfied the President.

While the Chiefs, with the exception of General Taylor, were criticized for being too belligerent in their recommended courses of action, they were praised for the manner in which the quarantine was conducted and the rapid response of all ground and air forces. Ironically, it was during the enforcement of the naval blockade that Admiral Anderson clashed with Secretary McNamara which was, partially at least, to lead to Anderson's premature retirement.

⁴⁰Schlesinger, p. 831.

⁴¹Sorensen, p. 692.

When Admiral Anderson joined the JCS on 1 August, 1961, he was the "new boy". The others, Lemnitzer, Decker, White and Shoup had been on board for some time. Aggressive and energetic, he immediately developed several issues he wanted to discuss with Secretary McNamara and the JCS in executive session. The older members who had had their share of friction with the Secretary apparently welcomed the opportunity to let Admiral Anderson absorb a little of the heat, and encouraged him to speak out.

He found it difficult to disguise his lack of enthusiasm for the "whiz kids" and other non-professional advisers in the Pentagon, and his willingness to bring up the subject of civilian officials throwing their weight around caused a certain amount of uneasiness in the office of the Secretary of Defense.

As time passed, it became clear that there was an irreconcilable personality clash between the Secretary and the Chief of Naval Operations. Both were strong willed and neither feared the other. Clearly Mr. McNamara was Admiral Anderson's superior, and there was no doubt whom the President would support if it came to that sort of decision.

Anderson lasted two years, and his experience during the Cuban missile crisis is illustrative of the low regard in which the service Chiefs were held. First, there was an incident on October 6th. Defense officials decided to send a squadron of Navy fighters from the Naval Air Station, Oceana, Virginia, to Key West, Florida, and to assign them temporarily under the Air Force in conjunction with the Air Defense effort. Deputy Defense Secretary Gilpatrick, without even advising the Navy Department, called directly to CINCLANTFLT, Admiral Dennison, and ordered

him to transfer the squadron.⁴²

As the Cuban crisis intensified, the Navy established its quarantine of Cuba, and Secretary McNamara became a frequent visitor to the Navy's operation center, or Flag Plot. The room contained visual materials locating the position of all ships in the Atlantic fleet, along with communications information and direct links to individual ships. McNamara insisted in personally directing the operation from Flag Plot, and began calling ship's commanders directly despite the tactful, but obvious protest of Admiral Anderson. The Navy uses highly formal voice communications with coded voice calls proceeding down through the chain of command. McNamara belittled or ignored these command techniques. On one occasion he pointed to a symbol denoting the position of one of the ships in the quarantine which showed it to be somewhat out of position and demanded of Admiral Anderson, "What's that ship doing there?". "I don't know," replied the Admiral, "but I have faith in my officers".⁴³ The ship in question had generated a submarine contact using a highly classified system of underwater detection and was prosecuting its contact. Admiral Anderson knew that some of the members of both his staff and McNamara's party were not cleared for this sensitive information. Later, CNO was able to explain the situation to the Secretary, which calmed him somewhat. Later, however, McNamara intimated to his confidants that it appeared to him that the CNO obviously didn't need any civilian help and had little time to

⁴² Jack Raymond, Power at the Pentagon (New York, 1964), pp. 285-286.

⁴³ Ibid.

answer questions, even from the Secretary of Defense..

The final break took place over the TFX project. McNamara insisted that all services endorse the multiservice aircraft and Admiral Anderson staunchly refused. Regardless of who was right or wrong, he had opposed the Secretary on too many issues and his dismissal was inevitable. Mr. Sorensen relates that,

...Anderson had overstepped the bounds of dissent with Kennedy and McNamara on more than one issue, and the meaning of his departure was not lost on his fellow brass; but his many backers in the Congress were unable to make out a case of martyrdom when Kennedy put his considerable talents to use by naming him Ambassador to Portugal.⁴⁴

Strained as the relation between SECDEF and CNO may have been, there is no evidence that the relationship between the President and his Navy Chief were ever anything but cordial. Anderson never publicly criticized the President and always loyally carried out his wishes. The President and his CNO obviously liked each other personally, but were separated by a conflict of viewpoint. Anderson stood up for what he thought was the right course of action for the Navy and the President really had no choice but to back up his Secretary of Defense. Thus Admiral Anderson became the second member of the JCS to retire after only one term. Later, however, General LeMay would have his second term cut short by one year.⁴⁵

LBJ and the JCS

When Lyndon B. Johnson became President of the United States, he brought to that office a pattern of precaution and wariness towards the

⁴⁴Sorensen, p. 608.

⁴⁵Ibid.

military. As a long time member of the Armed Services Committee, Johnson had developed attitudes about the military similar to those of Truman. Generally he stereotyped the military leaders as militaristic and extravagant: "The Generals know only two words -- spend and bomb."⁴⁶ During the Johnson administration, the JCS would be kept busy training and equipping troops and transporting them to Southeast Asia, but they would not be called upon to act as the President's principal military advisers. They would be called upon to carry out military and political decisions reached in the White House between the President and a small group of civilian advisers.

Hugh Sidey, a Time-Life reporter who covered the White House during the Johnson presidency provides a comprehensive insight into Johnson's thoughts about the military in general. In his book, "A Very Personal Presidency", Sidney reports:

His deep suspicions of the military went back to his first days in the Congress...he was given a seat on Carl Vinson's powerful Naval Affairs Committee. There he watched the high brass parade, and he was disturbed. He found that too many military men grew arrogant behind the ribbons they wore on their chests. He found them contemptuous of new ideas, mean and thoughtless in dealing with those below them. He detected an alarming amount of sheer stupidity which is self-perpetuating because of the academy caste system. He found no companionship with military men...In fact, the general level of competence which Johnson found among the admirals who came before the Naval Affairs Committee convinced him that the nation could not put its complete trust in the military in such hazardous times. How America met the threat had to be planned in detail, in Johnson's view, by the politicians.⁴⁷

Apparently this lack of confidence in the military remained with Johnson throughout his years as President. He felt, like Kennedy, that

⁴⁶Yarmolinsky, p. 48.

⁴⁷Hugh Sidney, A Very Personal Presidency (New York, 1968), pp. 202-204.

the military were too narrow-minded in their determinations of courses of action in resolving problems, and they never considered the political implications. Johnson was merciless when discussing the performance of his JCS privately and none of his Chiefs received more berating than General LeMay, USAF Chief of Staff under both JFK and LBJ. LeMay was credited with saying, in conjunction with advice on the conduct of the air war in North Vietnam, "We ought to bomb them back into the Stone Age."⁴⁸

Johnson heartily endorsed an axiom which President Kennedy had propounded to several of his close friends one evening. Sitting in his office, shortly before his death, JFK said,

Once you decide to send the bombers, you want men like LeMay flying them. But you can't let them decide if they should go or not.⁴⁹

As President Johnson assumed office, he inherited a decision-making structure which had been modified to meet the desires and personal preferences of his predecessor, who had been vitally interested in foreign affairs. The apparatus of the National Security Council had been scrapped and decision-making was accomplished through a number of small ad hoc groups of flexible composition.⁵⁰ Similarly, the JCS influence had been eroded and the military input was provided by Secretary McNamara or other civilian advisers.

Thus President Johnson, who was more uncertain than JFK in foreign

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention (New York, 1969), p. 4.

affairs, had inherited an organization for decision-making in that area which had been made deliberately loose and flexible by President Kennedy who had a broad knowledge, intuitive grasp and determined initiative in that field. This inheritance, according to Townsend Hoopes,

...adversely affected both the scope of deliberations on Vietnam policy and the quality of President Johnson's decisions from the fall of 1964 onwards, and showed itself in the structural weaknesses of the National Security Council and in inadequate attention to longer range policy planning. The principal results were fragmented debate, loose coordination, and an excessive concentration on problems of the moment.⁵¹

Given Johnson's relative lack of expertise in foreign affairs, he elected to retain many of the Kennedy advisers including Rusk and Rostow. Considering Johnson's uncertainty and the same set of advisers, it is understandable that Johnson would set the same course outlined by JFK. Moreover, the presidential election lay ahead and a policy of "Let us continue" was the politically expedient one.⁵² As the conflict intensified, the Vietnam war occupied more and more of Johnson's thinking and in order to deal with the subject, the "Tuesday Vietnam War for Lunch Bunch" was instituted. Each week, almost without fail, the President and his senior advisers gathered for lunch and deliberation in the President's Dining Room in the White House. The agenda was always some aspect of the Vietnam war.⁵³

Every President has had his personal preferences as to how he will conduct his war. Roosevelt dealt directly with General Marshall and the

⁵¹Ibid., p. 2.

⁵²Henry Brandon, Anatomy of Error (Boston, Mass., 1969), p. 31.

⁵³Henry Graff, The Tuesday Cabinet (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970), p. 3.

service leaders and through his own military Chief of Staff, Admiral Leahy. Truman worked through the JCS and when General MacArthur started making foreign policy, the President, supported by the JCS, relieved him. Kennedy, although using the JCS very little, nonetheless had his own personal military adviser, General Taylor, who was always close at hand. But only under pressure from Congress did Johnson admit the military to the war planning councils at all.

When Johnson initiated his Tuesday sessions, it was notable that there were no military included. The group was usually composed of Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Special Assistant Walt Rostow and, at first, Press Secretary Bill Moyers, later replaced by George Christian. This was the most powerful policy-making group in the administration for the eighteen month period in which it functioned. Both long-range plans and small tactical details were discussed. On one occasion, Johnson was studying targeting maps, deciding not only what targets were to be hit, but also prescribing the type and amount of ordinance to be delivered. The following week, relations with Red China might be the subject and other meetings might find the group discussing the quality of battle rations being served the fighting units in the forward areas. The military agenda was compiled by McNamara personally, and it was assumed he spoke for the consolidated opinion of the military services.⁵⁴

Theoretically, the JCS provided their inputs in the National Security Council sessions, but, by this time, the NSC had ceased to be a policy deliberation body and had become a policy ratifying body. The Chiefs

⁵⁴Sidney, p. 204-206.

could seek audiences with the President whenever they wanted, but in effect this resulted in putting the Secretary of Defense on report and retaliation could be effected in any number of ways such as cut-backs in funds for a particular program or early retirement.

In 1967, as Johnson's popularity began to drop to a new low and the Vietnam war was going badly, he began to receive Congressional criticism for his failure to heed the advice of his military commanders. Finally, after a series of military men testified before John Stennis' Armed Services Committee and when Stennis himself objected that military advice was being ignored, Johnson altered the composition of the Tuesday meetings to include General Wheeler, who had relieved General Taylor as Chairman of the JCS, and subsequently generals and admirals began appearing at the Tuesday meetings with greater frequency.⁵⁵ Moreover, Johnson resorted, as Truman had done, to using his military leaders in an "advocate" role by demonstrating that his policies were supported by the military. In the winter of 1967-68 he summoned General Westmoreland to address a joint session of the Congress concerning recommended policies in Vietnam. Johnson emphasized that his policies were in accord with the advice given by General Westmoreland, although it appears that Westmoreland had little to do substantively with the policies and was acting in more of an "advocate" role.⁵⁶

While Johnson's token gestures to make the military more a part of the strategic decision-making process calmed his Congressional critics,

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Yarmolinsky, p. 32.

it did little to alter the decision-making process and Johnson and four or five of his most trusted civilian advisers continued to make the crucial decisions. Press Secretary Moyers told a White House historian that President Johnson relied less on military advice than any president since Woodrow Wilson. (Military advice in this context meaning advice from the military).⁵⁷

Because of the sad experience of the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy had a war room installed in the White House from which the President could personally direct his war efforts. It was used during the Cuban missile crisis and Johnson subsequently used it to personally direct the Vietnam war effort.⁵⁸

The military was dismayed by the extreme control exercised by the President in directing the air war in Vietnam. Not only did Johnson make the tactical decisions usually made by the field commanders, but his policy of gradualism was in opposition to the policy recommended by the Chiefs. In 1965, when the bombing campaign became a major effort, the Chiefs had submitted a list of some ninety-four key targets which were selected in accordance with the air doctrines of mass, momentum and concentration to maximize the shock effects of air power to the fullest. North Vietnam was in a vulnerable position. Her defenses were weak. Her fuel storage, electric power complexes, transportation and other vital targets were concentrated and vulnerable. The rapid destruction of these key targets would, at the very least, have impeded material aid to the Viet Cong and may have discouraged the North Vietnamese leaders from taking further

⁵⁷ Graff, p. 50.

⁵⁸ Alfred Steinberg, Sam Johnson's Boy (New York, 1968), pp. 747, 771.

aggressive steps.

The bombing strategy designed by President Johnson undoubtedly had some effect on the North Vietnamese, but there was no real stoppage of the infiltration of men and material into South Vietnam.

The President was supported in his view by both McNamara and Taylor, who wanted to test their theory of flexible response, which in effect was to apply just as much pressure as needed to persuade the enemy to abandon their goals. In essence, the President borrowed the hardware from the services to make the strikes, but did not utilize that hardware in accordance with the doctrine and tactics necessary to make it effective.

As the public became more disillusioned with the Vietnam war and the military frustrations increased, Congressional members tried more and more to intercede with the President to change his policy. During one of the bombing halts, one of the influential senators pointedly told the President that he had to go all out to "win this thing now", even if it meant going "for the jugular". He pleaded with Johnson to turn the conduct of the war over to the military experts whose business it was to wage war. Johnson's reply was both immediate and resolute:

Not as long as I am President. As long as I sit here, the control will stay with the Commander-in-Chief.⁵⁹

The senator persisted, saying that the reason Roosevelt and Truman were great Presidents was because they let the military do their job.

Again Johnson responded emphatically,

I was around in those days. There were not many decisions made that Roosevelt did not know about. And Harry Truman watched

⁵⁹ Sidney, p. 201.

everything closely...I'm not going to let the hounds loose.⁶⁰

Paradoxically, while President Johnson exercised tight control over the bombing, he seemed more content to allow his field commander, General Westmoreland, and later General Abrams to conduct the ground war without presidential guidance. Unfortunately, however, the gradualism, as espoused by the President, was not compatible with the war of attrition which was being fought on the ground.

Having spent considerable time on President Kennedy and President Johnson in this examination of civil-military relations, it is useful at this point to turn to the role played by Robert McNamara who, under both Kennedy and Johnson, served longer as Secretary of Defense than any other man in the history of that office. During his tenure, the combined might of all the military forces of the U.S. rose to its highest point since WWII and at the same time, the influence of the military generally and the JCS specifically sank to an all-time low.

Prior to his brief tour in the military during WWII, Mr. McNamara spent most of his adult life as a student or school teacher. After WWII, he went to work for the Ford Motor Company, where, after fourteen years, he was selected as the first "non-Ford" President of that company.⁶¹ While he was working his way to the Presidency at Ford, there were a number of changes occurring in the Pentagon which would set the stage for him to dominate the JCS just as he had dominated the staff at Ford. These changes are directly related to the influence of the military in strategic decision-making and are worthwhile considering at this point.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Carl Borklund, Men of the Pentagon (New York, 1966), pp. 207-208.

Ironically, the high water mark of JCS influence occurred during WWII when the JCS did not officially exist. President Roosevelt put such trust and confidence in the Chiefs that he avoided issuance of a formal definition of their duties and functions arguing that a formal charter might impede them in their efforts in bringing the war to a speedy and successful conclusion.⁶² This complete freedom of action was reflected in a statement made by Admiral Leahy near the end of the war. When asked to comment on the restrictions under which he was working, he replied candidly that, "the Joint Chiefs of Staff are under no civilian control whatsoever".⁶³

Beginning with the National Security Act of 1947, the role of the JCS began to be prescribed and circumscribed. As the external threat posed by the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union grew, there were serious and honest disagreements about the method of containing the threat. Naturally, this controversy was focused in the JCS as the Chiefs tried to determine a best overall national military strategy. Fairly or unfairly, this lack of consensus caused a deep concern around Washington that the Chiefs were ineffective as an advisory body. There was a saying in Washington that "...the Congress debates, the Supreme Court deliberates, but the Joint Chiefs bicker". In an effort to minimize this bickering effect on national defense policy, the Congress and Executive took several steps to increase the authority and control of the Secretary of Defense over the service commands.

⁶² Samuel Huntington, "Power, Expertise and the Military Profession," Daedalus (Fall, 1963), p. 801.

⁶³ Ibid.

The National Security Act Amendments which were based largely on the recommendations of Secretary of Defense Forrestal and were reinforced by the first Hoover Commission Report, created a Department of Defense where only a coordinating body had existed. The Secretary, although strengthening his position, was still forbidden by law to encroach upon the combat functions assigned to the separate military services. Congress used this device to maintain the individual services, as it did again in subsequent reorganizations in 1953 and 1958. Nevertheless, this restriction has become less limiting on the authority of the Secretary of Defense as major strategic decisions have turned on problems of weapons development and financial management rather than directly on the controversy over roles and missions.⁶⁴

The reorganization plan of 1953 went another step further in centralizing civilian control by taking the JCS out of the chain of command so that it ran from the President to the Secretary of Defense through the civilian service secretaries directly to the commanders on the field. Additionally, several assistant Secretaries of Defense positions were created in functional areas such as supply, logistics, manpower and personnel. These posts were established as staff functions as advisers to the Secretary which in no way were meant to interpose another layer of civilian control between the services and the Secretary of Defense. However, in practice, the assistant Secretaries were often in a position to oppose the service viewpoint.⁶⁵ Thus, rather than assisting the services

⁶⁴Gene Lyons, "The New Civil-Military Relations," in Smith and Johns (eds.) American Defense Policy, p. 395.

⁶⁵U.S. Congress, Committee on Armed Services, Nominations, 85th Congress, 1st Session, 1958, p. 13.

in their functional roles, the assistant Secretaries in fact added another dimension to civilian control.

The reorganization of 1958 contained far-reaching consequences for the military which, in effect, brought about a de facto unification of the armed forces within the framework of a three departmental system. Under this Act, the Secretary of Defense was given the authority to exercise direct control over unified commands, transfer weapons systems from one service to another and maintain centralized direction of all military research and development through the Director of Research and Engineering. The practical impact of these powers was to give the Secretary of Defense considerable influence over the roles and missions of the services which were still prescribed by law within the broad and flexible categories of land, air and sea forces. The individual service secretaries were taken out of the chain of command and the JCS were given operational responsibility for the unified and specified commands, but were specifically forbidden any executive authority. The scope of the Chairman's duties was increased, giving him more influence over his fellow members, but at the same time a formal restraint was placed on easy communications between the JCS and Congress. Free communications with the President was inhibited by the chain of command. However, this increasing authority of civilian over the military was not granted without some misgivings within the civilian sector itself. Several aspects were viewed with concern: the turnover of civilians in the Pentagon; the inability of civilians to come to grips with problems which have no exact parallel outside the military establishment; the tendency for the Defense Department to evolve into a fourth operating agency of the military establishment; the pre-occupation

of Defense officials with budgetary matters; and delays in military programs as a result of the need to obtain clearances from a thickening layer of "functional" civilian secretaries. This buildup of civilian control caused Senator Henry Jackson to comment that "at one time we worried about a German General Staff setup in the Pentagon. I think we are at the point of a civilian general staff..."⁶⁶

Despite the increased control provided for by the 1958 reorganization, doubt still existed about the adequacy of civilian control exercised in the Department of Defense and, in particular, about the ability of the Secretary of Defense to control effectively such a large and complex organization. In 1961, a pre-inauguration task force was formed by President Kennedy to investigate the civilian-military relationship in the Department of Defense. The core of the task force report is capsulized in the following excerpt from that report:

Throughout all proposals, past and present, to make more effective the DOD organization has run one central theme -- the clarification and strengthening of the authority of the Secretary of Defense over the entire United States military establishment. There are some who believed even prior to the 1958 amendment of the National Security Act that existing legislation provided ample basis for the Secretary's authority. Others took a contrary view. It is the conclusion of this committee that the doctrine of civilian control will be compromised as long as doubt exists on this point.⁶⁷

Concerned by the task force report, Kennedy directed his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, to clarify and strengthen the role of the Secretary in the Department of Defense, a task which McNamara undertook vigorously.

⁶⁶ Lyons, p. 396.

⁶⁷ Stuart Symington, "Report of President-elect Kennedy's Task Force," New York Times, December 5, 1960, p. 2:4.

Seizing the initiative and armed with the requisite backing of President Kennedy, Secretary McNamara began to bring all activities in the Defense Department under his own control. Central to this effort was Mr. McNamara's conviction that,

The direction of the Department of Defense demands not only a strong, responsible civilian control, but a Secretary's role that consists of active, imaginative and decisive leadership of the establishment at large, and not the passive practices of simply refereeing the disputes of traditional and partisan factions.⁶⁸

The first step was to change the rules by which decisions about military strategy and procurement were made, and basically this was done by McNamara's introduction of the systems analysis approach. McNamara and his staff of systems analysts felt that the military leaders relied too much on their judgment and experience as a basis for decisions. The generals and admirals felt that some things could not be quantified and had to be decided on the basis of judgment and experience. Throughout the McNamara era the battle revolved around which items could be quantified and which ones could not.

The outcome of this struggle was vital to the future roles the generals and admirals were to play in strategic decision-making. Systems analysis had already proven itself to be a useful management tool, and its future was assured, but such was not the case for the generals and admirals. If almost every facet of decision-making could be quantified and rationalized mathematically, then there was really no need for the military leaders except to exercise command in the field. If judgment and experience were to be relegated to a minor role in the decision-making

⁶⁸ Robert McNamara, The Essence of Security (New York, 1968), p. x.

process, then the generals and flag rank officers were not needed anymore at the highest levels of the defense establishment, since it is primarily because of their judgment and experience that they hold their positions in the defense staff.

Traumatic as the McNamara experience was, it was not without a certain amount of benefit to the military. Probably the most positive contribution made by McNamara to military strength and readiness was that he forced the services to examine the basic logic concerning why they wanted certain hardware and programs.⁶⁹

It took the military a while to learn the new rules, but before long each service had formed its own systems analysis branch, who were just as capable as the ones in the DOD. Additionally, the services learned that by using certain assumptions, one could make the answers come out most any way that was desired.⁷⁰ Reports of this practice on the part of DOD analysts began to circulate and McNamara's spell over the Congress began to end. Perhaps the best example of both the manipulation of assumptions and the struggle for existence by the military leaders can be found in the TFX project.

Both the Navy and the Air Force needed a new attack aircraft, a new air-superiority aircraft, a new interceptor, and new reconnaissance aircraft. According to McNamara, one aircraft could be built to perform all these missions and at a great savings. There were three major stumbling blocks which prevented the accomplishment of this goal, however.

⁶⁹Borklund, p. 218.

⁷⁰Curtis LeMay, America is in Danger (New York, 1968), p. 301.

First, the Navy needed an aircraft which was stressed for carrier operations, able to withstand catapult launches and arrested landings, and the Air Force needed an aircraft suitable for field operations, stressed in different areas and able to operate in a dust and debris filled environment which is absent on a carrier deck. Second, the state of the art was not advanced enough to permit the incorporation of all the needed capabilities in one air-frame that anyone could reasonably be expected to maintain. Third, and perhaps the most insurmountable, was the animosity caused by the Secretary telling the services that they must combine everything into one airplane, telling them exactly how it was to be used, telling them they must all use the same airplane, and telling them just which manufacturer was going to build it. Before the episode was over, the TFX became extremely complicated by charges of intellectual corruption on the part of DOD analysts and there were rumors of political manipulation concerning the procedure whereby the contract was awarded to General Dynamics over Boeing. In the final analysis, the military view was vindicated when it turned out that the TFX could not do what DOD and General Dynamics said it would do and when it cost more than twice what DOD said it would.⁷¹ The Navy found the aircraft to be incompatible with carrier operations and the Air Force Tactical Command found it to be no match for what was known about Russian fighters already in production. Finally, it was forced upon the Strategic Air Command as a low-level nuclear bomber.⁷²

⁷¹Ibid., p. 237.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 22, 285, 291.

If the TFX was illustrative of the struggle for supremacy in the Pentagon, then its failure was an example of the consequences of ignoring the advice of the professional military. There was no solace for anyone concerning the TFX, and at best it was a Pyrrhic victory for the JCS.

McNamara and the JCS would continue to struggle, but in almost every case the Secretary would be the winner as long as he enjoyed the strong backing of the President. Never before had a Secretary of Defense enjoyed such rapport with and unqualified backing from the White House. McNamara once observed,

I couldn't accomplish anything over here without Presidential support. It is absolutely fundamental. I wouldn't and couldn't stay here one minute without it.⁷³

When White House aides pointed the finger at the JCS after the Bay of Pigs, McNamara waited a week before he made a formal statement and then it was a half-hearted rebuttal. When General Lemnitzer pointed out that the time frame given the JCS to consider McNamara's directive on the development in space was unrealistic and would not allow time for a comprehensive answer, he was ignored.⁷⁴ When McNamara and Admiral Anderson clashed, Anderson went to Portugal.

The conflict was not all one-sided, however. In addition to their lessons in systems analysis, the Chiefs soon learned that McNamara was able to capitalize on splits in their ranks. When they were divided, he would carry the day by pointing out the division to the President and Congress. When General Wheeler replaced General Taylor as Chairman of the JCS, however, he refused to bring split opinions or papers to the

⁷³ Borklund, p. 224.

⁷⁴ Raymond, p. 283.

Secretary. He would tell the other Chiefs that he would not adjourn the meeting until they could reach an agreement.⁷⁵ The united front eventually paid off for the JCS, for even McNamara was hesitant about overruling a united or common professional opinion. Consequently, such items as a nuclear carrier and the ABM, which the Secretary opposed for about five years, were finally approved. While this imposed consensus resulted in increased strength in the JCS, it detracted from the model relationship which calls for "understanding between the civil representatives of the State and leaders of the Armed Forces in order to coordinate national policy with the power to enforce it." This understanding could hardly take place when alternate plans and strategies were not even available to the civilian leaders. A forced consensus replaced military advice and honest difference of opinion--a consensus the Chiefs felt they needed to protect them from the "divide and conquer" tactics of the Secretary of Defense.

Despite difficulties, disagreements and almost open warfare between the DOD staff and the JCS and service staffs, Mr. McNamara continued to meet with the JCS almost every Monday afternoon. As time went on, the discussions became less and the silences grew longer until toward the end of McNamara's reign, he and the Chiefs just sat around the table and looked at each other across a silent gulf that had grown too wide to be bridged.

On behalf of the Secretary, there is no reason to question his dedication nor his loyalty and patriotism. Much of what he did for the

⁷⁵ Lawrence Korb, "The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff," Naval War College Review, December, 1971, p. 32.

military was beneficial, but his abrupt managerial methods, his lack of understanding of the values held by the military and his chilling personality prevented him from accomplishing all that he could have, and many of his changes failed to last through his tenure.

President Nixon and the JCS

Shortly after his inauguration, Richard Nixon appointed a "Blue Ribbon Defense Panel" to study the "entire organization, structure, and operation of the Department of Defense,"⁷⁶ the first comprehensive study undertaken since those performed by the Hoover Commission. Like the Hoover Commission, one of the primary concerns of the Panel was that civilian control should be clearly dominant in the formulation of national policy and that the civilian control of the military establishment must be clearly established and firmly maintained. In what appeared to be a contradictory statement, the Panel found that effective civilian control was impaired by a generally excessive centralization of decision-making authority in the office of the Secretary of Defense. This comment points out, however, that, considering Laird's philosophy of decentralization, the organization which he inherited was structured for centralization and did not provide him with the proper controls for effective supervision of major policy decisions.

Included in the Panel's findings were two points which are relevant here: too many layers of both civilian and military staffs and that staffs were too large from the office of the Secretary of Defense, the military departments extending down through the field commands, the Joint Chiefs of

⁷⁶ Blue Ribbon Defense Panel, Report to the President and the Secretary of Defense on the Department of Defense (Washington, 1970), p. 10.

Staff and the Unified and Component Commands;^{*} and an erosion of the effectiveness of the JCS as presidential advisers due to their "three hatted" role of (1) supervisors of their individual services, (2) participants in the advisory and planning functions assigned by statute to the JCS, and (3) as members of the Secretary's staff for matters of operational command relative to the Unified and Specified Commands.⁷⁷

The Panel recommended that, in order to alleviate the Chiefs of their responsibility as operational advisers in the case of the Unified and Specified Commands, a Deputy Secretary of Defense (Operations) be instituted with its own joint operations staff, and that interposed between the Deputy and the Unified and Specified Commands should be a Strategic Command, a Tactical Command and a Logistics Command.⁷⁸ Indeed, such a move would take pressure off the Chiefs. But at the same time, it would add to the increasing amount of civilian and military layers of control which the Panel also found undesirable.

The Panel found that the military influence was not as effective as it could be in policy-making. The President and the Secretary of Defense did not, the Panel felt, have the opportunity to consider all viable options as background for making major decisions because, partially as a carryover from the McNamara era, differences of opinion were submerged or compromised at lower levels of the DOD and especially in the JCS.⁷⁹

^{*}When James Forrestal became the first Secretary of Defense, he envisioned a staff of about 15 to 25 men. One of the Panel's recommendations was that the OSD be limited to 2000; it is currently staffed at about 3500.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 32-33.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 61.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 1.

Although there were no major organizational changes implemented in the DOD, the Nixon administration appears to have established a pattern of civilian-military relations which reverses that of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Secretary Melvin Laird granted the military more autonomy and reduced the role of civilian staffers, unlike McNamara and Clark Clifford, who kept the uniformed military on a comparatively tight rein and permitted civilian defense staffs to flourish. Simultaneously, Henry Kissinger's highly structured National Security Council and the new Defense Policy Review Committee, suggest that President Nixon substituted rigorous civilian institutional procedures for the rigid civilian systems analysis of his predecessors, as his means of assuring civilian control.⁸⁰ Due to its potential power and significance, it is useful to comment here on the Defense Policy Review Committee, established by President Nixon in 1969. The DPRC was brought into existence, according to one observer, because of some relatively minor foreign policy problem"which was created for the President by the unconsidered consequences of a force reduction which had been ordered earlier in 1969. Another observer believes that the DPRC was created by a suggestion from Secretary Laird, who felt that he could not provide adequate guidance within the Pentagon on the matter of defense budgeting unless he knew how defense matters were regarded in terms of priorities within the entire Federal budget context. But, whatever the origins of the DPRC, its functions and missions are staggering. Its main task is to try to anticipate all possible political and economic

⁸⁰Yarmonlinsky, p. 30.

and social implications, both foreign and domestic, resulting from any changes in defense spending, budgeting, force levels, and related considerations, trying to assess trade-offs between domestic and foreign programs. This really strikes at the heart of everything--the \$64 question--the overall assignment of priorities. If the DPRC works as it is apparently designed to work, it will be the first time in American history that any person or group short of the President himself has been assigned to the task of looking at all policy problems of the United States ranging across the whole spectrum from domestic to foreign.

Membership in the DPRC includes Dr. Henry Kissinger, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Undersecretary of State, the Chairman of the JCS, the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, and the Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers.⁸¹

Most powerful new units of government seem to arouse resentment and suspicion from the military, but the JCS appears pleased with the DPRC. Having the JCS Chairman on the Committee gives the DOD two representatives against only one for each of the several agencies. Moreover, this position gives the Chairman of the JCS a second membership on a very high-level decision-making body within the White House context. (He also sits on the NSC Undersecretary's Committee).

Military leaders have generally felt more optimistic toward the Nixon administration than they had felt during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. They feel that Secretary Laird has exhibited a personality

⁸¹Vincent Davis, "American Military Policy: Decision making in the Executive Branch," Naval War College Review, May, 1970, pp. 13-14.

style which is more to their liking, despite reductions in the defense budget. And, although President Nixon does not confer directly with the JCS nor have his personal military adviser, they feel adequately represented at top White House levels through some of the channels already discussed. Nevertheless, there were some major challenges posed by the Nixon administration. The first challenge was that the JCS had an opportunity to be intimately involved in making the defense budget, and obviously national military policy at a key stage. The pitfall to be avoided was that they could not appear before Congress, blaming their financial difficulties on the OSD. It appears to date that this pitfall has been avoided.

A second pitfall lay in the opportunity to fall into the interservice rivalry which was prevalent during the McNamara era. This potential problem is magnified in the face of continually decreasing defense budgets. This problem has not surfaced to any alarming degree, although the fiscal 1973 budget has somewhat alleviated the pressure, especially for the Navy. More importantly, however, the climate provided by the Nixon-Laird administration has not been conducive to the inter-service rivalry as it had been in the early days of the Kennedy-McNamara administration.

Conclusions

The lack of understanding which existed between the civil representatives of the State and the leaders of the Armed Forces was clearly evident from 1961 to 1968. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, though different in many ways, both shared a certain distrust of the opinions of the JCS. McNamara challenged the military on their home ground and placed them on the defensive. It is unfortunate that this serious internal conflict

occurred at a time when decisions were made that committed the prestige and power of the United States in a new and frustrating manner. While the intentions of the men involved--Presidents, Secretary of Defense, and the Chiefs--were obviously the best, the result of the strained relationship between the civilian and military leaders of the U.S. has had a serious effect on national security.

If genuine civil control over the military is the ideal, and this paper takes the position that it is, then the President and the Congress not only are obliged to define the role of the military, but also to protect the role of the military. The military probably is better equipped to defend the nation than it is itself.

The military is likely to play whatever role is allotted to it by civil authority regardless of how it sees its own role; however, it is difficult for senior military officers to keep from entering the political arena when the opportunity to do so is clearly available.

Very few American Presidents have the background to prepare them for responsibility of becoming the nation's grand strategist. The wise President seeks the counsel of his military leaders. He is not compelled to accept their advice, but he should, at least, listen and further, it seems that he should insist that the military observe the precepts of their profession and offer "purely" military advice.

The civil-military environment in which the JCS operated during the Kennedy-Johnson era was marked by degrees of prejudice, pride and arrogance. The attitudes and actions of both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were affected by their prejudices regarding the military. The friction that grew between McNamara and the Joint Chiefs grew largely from McNamara's

pride and intellectual arrogance, and to a lesser extent, from the arrogance of certain of his Chiefs.

In the final analysis, it is the President and the Congress who should determine the role of force in each situation, but the military can best define the capability of that force to achieve the stated policy objectives. It is the duty of the civilian leaders to apply military power correctly, and correspondingly, it is the duty of the military to carefully state the capabilities of its forces and to make it clear in a given situation just what the forces can and cannot be expected to accomplish. Unfortunately, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations saw neither the need for, nor the merit of independent professional military advice on policy matters which were fundamentally military in nature.

The Nixon administration, however, has reversed this trend. Nixon has made it clear through his Secretaries of Defense, Laird and Richardson that the military input is encouraged in the decision-making process in a meaningful way. This will require the JCS to think in broad and strategic terms. Military leaders were not ready and able to do this after WWII, and civilian strategists filled the vacuum in designing and elaborating the basic concepts--primarily the notions of deterrence and containment--which guided overall American military policy until at least 1960. Then, in the early 1960's, President Kennedy and Secretary McNamara tended to sidetrack the military leaders in favor of personal advisers. Therefore, the military leaders in 1970 had experienced a quarter of a century in which they were seldom afforded an opportunity or much encouragement to think in broad, strategic terms. President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger have indicated a desire to think in such terms and they have openly invited the military to participate. The opportunity to the military leaders to return to the model relationship in strategic policy-making is accordingly obvious.

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